

S. B. 456 PRO

Good morning Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Erin Oleynek. I am a graduate student of the University of Connecticut school of social work and a current resident of the city of Hartford. For my political advocacy class I am *required* to testify at a public hearing, but I am lucky to have the chance to testify on one I feel passionate about, raised senate bill 456, ***AN ACT CONCERNING HARASSMENT, ELECTRONIC HARASSMENT AND CYBERSTALKING***. I am in full support of the passing of this bill.

My internship for school this year works in collaboration with the two West Hartford high schools, Hall and Conard, and much of my time has been spent counseling students in the schools. Many of my clients come to me with problems of bullying, both in school and on the internet. This problem has become very prominent in both schools. I have seen first hand the effects cyber harassment has on an adolescent, and also read horrible stories nationwide. One personal example I can share is the story of a student I have met with numerous times. This person, lets call her Jane, has been experiencing cyber harassment to the point of desperation. She comes to me in tears, claiming these people have not only affected her personal well-being, but also completely stunted her academics and threatened her emotional stability to the point where she is unable to function normally in social settings. As a social worker, and as a human being, this is disturbing and something needs to be done.

The current federal law around cyber harassment, which includes the state of Connecticut, is not broad enough to help this student I speak of, and she is just an example of thousands of others who are greatly affected by cyber harassment. Only certain conduct is punishable with our current legislation, harassment that is a direct threat, or communication that is made directly with the victim, as in an email. This leaves out the numerous incidents where acts of bullying are publicly performed for people to see in chat rooms and on bulletins such as facebook. This act would help to eliminate the bullying which goes unpunished and in turn has made permanent, traumatic effects on many lives, and even taken precious others.

I hope that when you contemplate your position on this act, you think of Jane. Jane, hopelessly with no where else to turn, sought out help from an older male family member for safety. Because she was cyber-bullied to no end, she had this family member do her fighting for her. An altercation has since occurred, and now this family member has been arrested, and the bully has been physically injured. Jane has now been removed from the school. All of this could have been avoided had there been proper legislation in place to stop the bully in a way that wouldn't result in physical harm. The lives of each person involved in this particular story has been negatively affected, and this is just one of many stories of bullying which affect people all over the state. We are in desperate need for legitimate legislation in place to stop bullying before it escalates to a level that threatens a persons mental and physical well-being, a level we see reached too often on a daily basis.

Thank you for listening to me today, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have!

Erin Oleynek
139 Girard Ave.
Hartford, CT 06105
(860) 303-8277